

The influence of social network on the development of volunteer groups in a community (1)*

~The qualitative research by interview to the leader of volunteer group~

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Introduction

The purpose of this research was to investigate the function of social network on formation and expansion stage of volunteer group qualitatively.

Recently, volunteer groups' activity prospers in world widely. As same, many volunteer groups act in Japan. In 2010, there were over 40,000 NPO groups in Japan (Cabinet office, 2010). However, these groups did not constitute all the volunteer groups in Japan, because there were also many non-NPO groups. The compiled data on volunteers and volunteer groups indicate that there were 7.4 million people engaged in volunteer work, as well as nearly 120,000 (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, 2010).

It is pointed out that the volunteer groups play an important role for the social movement (Katagiri, 1995). Various theories, such as relative deprivation theory (Crosby, 1976), have ever been proposed to explain social movement, but now the resource mobilization theory (Oberschall, 1978) is developed as most leading theory to do this. According to this theory, it is supposed that resources (ex. money or time) and social networks become important factors for the development of social movement, such as a volunteer group activity. Especially, many researches about the social network have revealed that what network was used to assemble the people and what network participants in a volunteer group hold and form within and without their group. For example, Katagiri (1995) revealed that participants in antinuclear movement were invited by the member of secondary group such as an acquaintance of a work place or an affiliation organization rather than by the member of primary group such as a family or relative. And Ohnuma, Ando & Okamoto (2000) revealed that weak tie (Granovetter, 1973) affects the participation in an environmental volunteer.

Thus, these researches have focused on the cross relationship such as relationship between individuals in a group, between individual and group, and between groups. These social networks are thought changing with progress of time, since the volunteer group which consists of spontaneous participants repeats the substitution of members and integration or segregation with other groups. Moreover, former researches have had little attention to the process how volunteer group organized and developed. That is, there are little researches that investigate the volunteer group from the longitudinal viewpoint.

One of the research which examined the volunteer groups in longitudinal is Li (2002). He has examined the role of leader of a volunteer group at the stage of development (formation and expansion). However, he doesn't also refer to the social network which leader used for development their group.

Then, this study aims to investigate the influence of social network on the development of volunteer groups by researching what kind of network has used in formation and expansion stage. To examine this problem, it is necessary to research along with the developmental process of a group. So, interviews to the founder and representative of some volunteer groups were performed to get the preliminary knowledge about influence of social network.

*Key words: volunteer, social network, developmental stage of group

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Method

Target groups and respondents

Volunteer groups in Ashiya city (Hyogo Japan) or near cities were targeted. The population of Ashiya city is about 85,000 and the area is 18.57 km².

A snowball sampling (one group introduced next groups) was used. Some various groups, for example environmental or welfare volunteer group, were targeted. And leaders or founder of groups were selected as respondents because it was required to get to know the process of group from the foundation until present. Finally, ten groups (fourteen respondents) were interviewed. A mean of age of respondents was 58.6. A feature of each group was following Table1.

Interview

Questions were mainly composed of 3 items (1. the process of group foundation, 2. performing for increasing members, 3. existence of groups that cooperate with).

Table 1 A feature of target groups

Group	Sex	Purpose of Group	Category	Present members	Members at the foundation
Group A	F	Town planning through gardening	Community	16	6
Group B	F	Learning meeting between welfare volunteers	Welfare	10	20
Group C	F	Creation of the reading tape for blind persons	Welfare	14	4
Group D	F	Activity stuck to the area	Community	7	6
Group E	F	Research and activity about an environmental problem	Environment	5	3
Group F	F	A gathering of the family holding demented elderly	Welfare	60	20
Group G	F	Activities about agriculture, food, and environment	Environment	350	100
Group H	F	The support activities to Bangladesh	Oversea support	30	7
Group I	M	Environmental purification using effective micro-organisms	Environment	20	3
Group J	M	Making a pond by the biotope.	Environment	6	6

Results

A cause of group foundation and using social networks at this stage

Respondents were asked the cause of group foundation. Judging from responds, three types were obtained.

- Type1—A sect, independence, and change from a related groups (Group A · B · C · F · G · J)

Ex.—After the opposition movement about apartment construction, the goal of group changed and inaugurated present group.

- Type2—Self concern (Group E · I)

Ex.—Activity of Earth Day was seen in the newspaper and respondent established the present group.

- Type3—Responding to the request from the others, or support (Group D · H)

Ex.—The director of a kindergarten asked for cooperation and present group was founded.

Next, respondents were asked what kinds of social network they used at the stage of foundation. As a result, following patterns were obtained.

- Pattern1—Asking members of private volunteer groups that they had belonged before (Group A · C · G)
- Pattern2—Asking members of public associations (associations which organized by administration etc.) that they had belonged before. (Group B · D · F · H · J)

- Pattern3—Using personal networks (friends or acquaintances) (Group E · I)

Examining the relationship between types of the cause of foundation and patterns of the used networks, the result became like Table2.

Table 2 Cross-table about types of cause and patterns of using networks

	Pattern 1	Pattern 2	Pattern 3	Sum
Type 1	3	3	—	6
Type 2	—	—	2	2
Type 3	—	2	—	2
Sum	3	5	2	10

In the case of type1, it became clear that networks that founder had in former private volunteer groups or public associations who had belonged were used. Next, in the case of type2, personal network was used. Finally, in the case of type3, the network of the public association which founder had joined before was used. However, in this type, it is thought that the network to be used is influenced by where a request and support are made from. It seems that the result concentrated on this pattern2, since a request and support were made from the director of administration or a kindergarten in this research.

As mentioned above, when newly forming a group, it was shown that the existing network which respondents had was used. In addition, as a concrete method when assembling a member, appeal was taken in most groups. As an object of the appeal, it was made to those who have an intimate relation individually, and those with whom interest and concern agree.

Social network at the stage of expansion

The expansion of group scale is one of index of group development. As table1 shows, the number of members was increasing in most groups. Then, the way that each groups actually used for increasing the number of members was asked.

- Method1—Using media (6 cases)
- Method2—Registering with administration (3 cases)
- Method3—Asking friends (3 cases)
- Method4—Inviting people who came public events (4 cases)

As this, it became clear that volunteer groups used various methods for expanding their group scale. These methods could be classified into two types. One type was to yield a new network like method 1 and 4, and another type was to use existing network like method 2 and 3.

Intergroup network

In order to investigate the network between groups, respondents were asked about the existence of any groups which cooperated each other. All groups exchanged information with other groups. And, most groups cooperated mutually on the occasions such as a public event (9 cases). Moreover, there were some groups which had accorded to lecture request / support request from other groups and administration (5 cases). However, there was no group which cooperated each other constantly in everyday activity.

In this research, a snowball sampling was used. Examining the relation between groups from this sampling, intergroup relation was as follow.

・ Intergroup network1

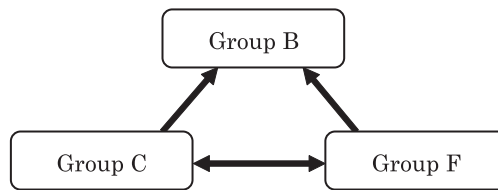


Fig1. Intergroup network1

Member of group B was consisted of leaders of other welfare volunteer groups. Moreover, this group played a role of coordinator. That is, this group was the center of welfare volunteer groups in this area. In addition, more groups were connected with group B.

・ Intergroup network2

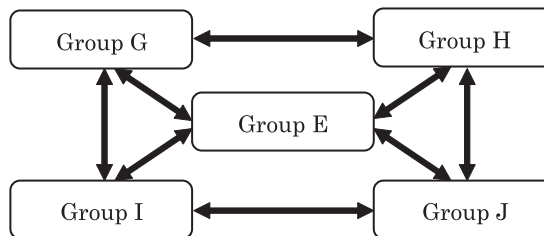


Fig2. Intergroup network2

This network was mainly constructed by some groups which concern an environmental problem. However, any other groups that had different purpose related to this network, and the purpose of all was not single issue. Compared to intergroup network 1, the relationship among groups was interactive.

・ Intergroup network3

There was relation between Group A and D. These groups have registered with the administration and connected with other groups in this connection.

Asking about the reason of cooperation of intergroup, many respondents replied that they cooperate because they also participated in other group. Actually, 11 of 14 respondents belonged to two or more groups. Especially, this tendency was shown among the above-mentioned networks. That is, a multiple membership was recognized.

Discussion

As a general trend, it became clear that every group had used existing network to form new group. This result corresponds with the view of the resource mobilization theory which consider the existing network as the main factor of social movement. And existing networks were categorized three types, one is the private volunteer group which respondents had joined before, second is the public association which respondents had belonged before, third is a personal network. Especially, the network of public association was used most frequently among these three types. This result may indicate that the existing network of public association becomes the base of creation of new volunteer group in a community.

Discussing about the formation stage more detail, new groups were formed by the individuals who had an intimate relation or had same interest and concern each other in the existing network. From this result, it can be thought that the strong connection between individuals is important at the stage of group formation. At this stage, high costs for systematizing a group were taken. Using the existing network reduces this cost. However, this cost was hardly reduced when individuals have different goals or can't communicate smoothly. It is important to share the common goal and understand each other for reducing cost more effectively.

Next, we discuss about the influence of the social network at the stage of expansion. To extend a group, it is important to increase its social influence. According to social impact theory, a number is indicated as one important factor of the social influence (Latané & Wolf, 1981). A volunteer group tends to be regarded as a minority by the group size (Nonami, 2001). It is important for a volunteer group to increase members in order to have more social influence. Four types of methods to expand their group size (1.using media, 2.registering with administration, 3.asking friends & 4.inviting people who came public events) were taken. In the point of view communication, method 1 and 2 are classified into indirect communication and others are classified into direct communication (Ando, 2002), and it revealed that various communication channels were used at the expansion stage. These methods can also be categorized what yield a new network (method 1&4) and what use the existing network (method 2&3). It became clear from this result that two types of methods are used for the expansion of the group.

As another social network at the expansion stage, the intergroup network was examined. Consequently, it became clear that many groups have exchanged information and have cooperated with others on the occasion of a public event, whereas there was no group which cooperates each other constantly at the time of the usual activity. That is, the connection between groups is considered to be a comparatively loose.

Moreover, investigating a multiple membership, almost participants belonged not only to the present group but to two or more groups. Such a member does the role of the mediation which connects group and group, and also produces a member's compatibility by inviting the member of other groups to one's group, or being invited by other group. As this, it can be thought that a multiple membership becomes the important base for formation of the intergroup network and expansion of the group size.

As mentioned above, this research has examined influence of the social network on the development of a volunteer group. Summarized the results, it was shown that the intimate network between individuals was important at the stage of group formation, and on the other hands, that a new network, the existing network, loose relation between groups and multiple membership became important at the expansion stage. Social networks surrounded a volunteer group were very pluralistically, and the networks what is used is different according to each stage.

However, it couldn't be sufficient for discussing in theoretical since this research only focused on investigating in actual condition what kind of network the volunteer group used. For example, it will be necessary to examine the adjustment with the weak tie theory (Granovetter, 1973). To confirm this purpose, it needs to research not only qualitative study like interviews but also quantitative study like questionnaire. Moreover, this research has limited participants to the leader or founder of the group, but to grasp correctly multiple membership, the network between organizations, and the network in a group, it will be important to investigate also not only to a leader but to a follower.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to investigate the influence of social network, such as personal network, community network and inter-group network, on the formation and expansion of volunteer groups in a community.

In the interviews, fourteen people consisting of leaders, representatives and founders of volunteer groups were asked to respond what kinds of network they used from the stage of foundation until present. Ten target groups consisted of 5 environmental volunteer groups, 4 welfare volunteer groups and 1 multipurpose volunteer group.

Firstly, the interview survey revealed that individuals who had similar orientations and/or interests formed new volunteer groups. Thus, at the stage of formation, intimate relationship among individuals was important. Next, at the stage of group expansion, it was found that a personal network such as acquaintances and/or friends and a community network which was newly formed by public events and/or advertisements were used. Moreover, volunteer members belonged to two or more groups, not a single group. This result suggested that multiple memberships produced inter-group network among volunteer groups, and promoted group development.

Key Words: volunteer, social network, developmental stage of group